



U.S. House of Representatives
Joe Cunningham
1st District, South Carolina

July 24, 2019

The Honorable Matthew Donovan
Acting Secretary of the Air Force
1670 Air Force Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1670

Dear Secretary Donovan:

We write to you concerning the use of polyfluoralkyl substances (PFAS) on Joint Base Charleston. In a study obtained by *The Post and Courier*, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers determined that PFAS was present in groundwater on Joint Base Charleston.ⁱ Given the health and environmental hazards associated with PFAS exposure, we respectfully request to be briefed on the Department of the Air Force's plans to address this issue.

As you know, PFAS are extremely persistent in the environment and, according to numerous studies, are linked to a variety of negative health effects. What makes these chemicals especially hazardous is their persistence in the human body, allowing them to accumulate over time, increasing the risk of low birth weight; changes in liver, immune, and thyroid function; and some cancers.ⁱⁱ

We are deeply concerned by the findings of the Air Force's previously-unreleased study, which found PFAS are present at five sites on Joint Base Charleston in concentrations significantly higher than the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Lifetime Health Advisory level of 70 parts per trillion (ppt). In fact, in some locations, samples contained PFAS concentrations hundreds of times higher than the EPA's suggested limit.

Although the study further determined "[t]here is no immediate threat to public water supply wells or private drinking water sources..." from the PFAS found at the tested sites, the study did not state whether or not the chemicals could travel through ground water. Furthermore, the study found discharge from the sites may be draining into the Popperdam Creek, which flows into the Ashley River.ⁱⁱⁱ

Alarming, there is evidence to suggest this is already having an effect. In 2015, a study by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration concluded there were significant levels of PFAS in the Ashley and Cooper rivers as well as further downstream.^{iv} And, in a study published by researchers from the Medical University of South Carolina earlier this year, they found PFAS concentrations in locally-caught fish "exceeded human screening values for cancer risk in certain species and locations".^v

As elected representatives, it is our duty to ensure that the health and well-being of our constituents are not put at risk as a result of federal activities. Accordingly, we respectfully request that the Department provide us with a briefing that addresses the following items:

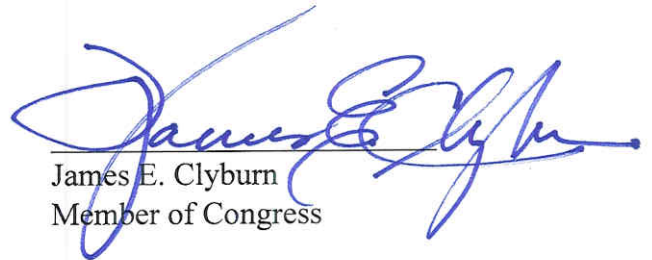
- What is the status and the scope of the "remedial investigation" recommended for each site in the Army Corps of Engineers' 2018 report?
- Does the Air Force have any plans to test sites off base for presence of PFAS?
- What actions has the Department taken to address PFAS contamination at affected sites on Joint Base Charleston and/or to mitigate drainage from these sites?
- Are PFAS currently being released on Joint Base Charleston, including during training and in emergency situations?
- In developing a course of action, has the Department considered the effects PFAS originating from Joint Base Charleston may have on the local environment?
- In developing a course of action, has the Department considered the effects PFAS originating from Joint Base Charleston may have on local marine life, including the health risks posed by consuming locally-caught fish?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joe Cunningham
Member of Congress



James E. Clyburn
Member of Congress

ⁱ Brown, Andrew. 2019. "The Air Force polluted 4 SC bases with a toxic firefighting foam, didn't tell neighbors." The Post and Courier, July 13.

ⁱⁱ US Environmental Protection Agency. 2019. <https://www.epa.gov/pfas/basic-information-pfas#health>.

ⁱⁱⁱ 2018. "Final Site Inspections Report of Fire Fighting Foam Usage at Joint Base Charleston-Air, Charleston County, and North Auxiliary Airfield, Orangeburg County, South Carolina."

^{iv} White, Natasha D., Len Balthis, Kurunthachalam Kannan, Amila O. De Silva, Qian Wu, Katherine M. French, James Daugomah, Christine Spencer, and Patricia A. Fair. 2015. "Elevated levels of perfluoroalkyl substances in estuarine sediments of Charleston, SC." Total Environment 79-89.

^v Fair, Patricia A, Beth Wolf, Natasha D White, Stephen A Arnott, Kurunthachalam Kannan, Rajendiran Karthikraj, and John E. Vena. 2019. "Perfluoroalkyl substances (PFASs) in edible fish species from Charleston Harbor and tributaries, South Carolina, United States: Exposure and risk assessment." Environmental Research 266-277.